STEPPENWOLF(20260810...
PDF

Haller accused me of getting lost in the woods at one point. That seems to be related to the London Dream where I feel intense anxiety about being lost in London. Discuss.

Worked for 37s

Yes. I think the connection is quite strong, and the chronology makes it stronger than a merely retrospective resemblance.

Haller's phrase was not simply something she had said months earlier. At the **January 23, 2020 session**, you explicitly brought it back into the room while criticizing her resistance to free association: "You once criticized me for 'getting lost in the woods' when I was associating." You immediately connected her phrase with Caligor's emphasis on free association, regression, and emergence of unconscious processes. STEPPENWOLF(20260810-131709) Less than a week later, the London dream transformed that metaphorical accusation into a terrifying concrete experience: you have wandered away from the hotel, cannot remember its name or location, and think, "I am truly lost, utterly lost, with no hope of getting back." STEPPENWOLF(20260810-131709)

That looks very much like dream-work operating on Haller's language.

## "Getting lost" has two opposite meanings

What is particularly interesting is that **your conscious position and the dream's emotional position are almost opposites**.

Consciously, you defended "getting lost in the woods." You argued that this is precisely what free association requires: relinquishing deliberate direction so that unexpected connections can emerge. Elsewhere in the manuscript you actually reverse Haller's criticism and make it positive: one must "get lost in the woods" to find the "wild mushrooms" from which analytic understanding can be made. STEPPENWOLF(20260810-131709)

But the London dream says something different:

**Getting lost is terrifying.**

That does not invalidate your intellectual argument for free association. Psychoanalytically, the discrepancy may be exactly the point. There may be a conflict between:

- **a wish to become lost** — to surrender ordinary conscious control, regress, associate freely, enter the unconscious;
- **a fear of becoming lost** — losing orientation, losing the object, and discovering that nobody can help you find your way back.

That would make Haller's phrase extraordinarily evocative for you. She may inadvertently have named both **what you wanted from analysis and what you feared about analysis**.

## The hotel makes the connection specifically transferential

Your own association is important here. You identify the hotel as possibly representing the analyst's office: one temporarily occupies a hotel room just as one temporarily occupies the analyst's room. STEPPENWOLF(20260810-131709)

So the dream is not merely:

> I am lost.

It is more specifically:

> **I have wandered away from the analytic object and cannot find my way back to it.**

And that makes Haller's “woods” remark considerably more psychologically charged.

She was effectively saying, *When you follow your associations, you lose the path.*

The dream takes the proposition seriously:

**Suppose I really do lose the path. Who will get me back?**

That is where the cabbie becomes especially important.

## “What will I tell a cabbie?”

The most revealing feature may actually be that you are not merely lost; **you cannot give another person the information necessary to rescue you**.

Your manuscript already identifies an extraordinary antecedent. About four months earlier you had told Haller:

> you were like a taxi driver whom you depended upon to get you where you needed to go, while she depended upon **you** to provide the directions.

You described that situation as desperate, as though you would never reach the destination. STEPPENWOLF(20260810-131709)

Then the dream produces the almost perfect pictorial representation:

**Cabbie:** Where do you need to go?
**You:** I don't know. I can't tell you.

That is a powerful representation of your complaint about the treatment.

You need the analyst precisely because **you do not already possess the map**. Yet you experience the analyst as requiring you to supply the map.

Consequently, "What will I tell the cabbie?" can be translated psychodynamically as something close to:

**How can I tell my therapist how to get me to a psychic destination whose location I do not know? Isn't knowing how to get there supposed to be part of what I need the analyst for?**

Your manuscript itself reaches essentially this possibility when it asks whether the cabbie means: "What am I even able to tell my therapist about my inner states?" and "Is this therapist even able to help me to get to my destination?" STEPPENWOLF(20260810-131709)

## Haller may become the voice inside the dream

There is another possibility that I think deserves emphasis.

Haller's accusation may have become **introjected**.

Her statement:

**"You got lost in the woods."**

could become, within the dream:

**"I really am lost."**

In other words, the dream might dramatize the patient's temporary identification with the analyst's representation of him. Haller sees associative wandering as loss of direction;

several days after explicitly revisiting that criticism with her, you dream yourself as a man whose wandering has resulted in catastrophic disorientation.

That would give the dream a subtle superego/transference dimension. The anxiety may partly represent the consequence of accepting Haller's judgment:

> Perhaps she is right. Perhaps following my mind wherever it goes does not lead to discovery. Perhaps it leaves me stranded.

And the extremity of the dream thought—**"no hope of getting back"**—suggests that something much more affectively primitive has attached itself to Haller's seemingly ordinary metaphor. STEPPENWOLF

### But there is an important reversal

The dream can support the opposite interpretation simultaneously.

Perhaps you are lost **not because you free-associate too much, but because Haller is not helping you navigate your associations**.

That fits the rest of the dream beautifully. London represents the hoped-for psychoanalytic experience, yet instead of the old, distinctive London you expected, you encounter an ordinary modern metropolis. You explicitly associated this with your disappointment that seeing a psychoanalyst had turned out to feel like seeing an ordinary therapist.

STEPPENWOLF(20260810-131709)

So the structure becomes:

**I came to London looking for something special.**
→ *I came to psychoanalysis looking for analytic depth.*

**Instead I find generic modern buildings.**
→ *The therapy feels generic/supportive rather than analytic.*

**I wander farther and farther.**
→ *I continue associating, thinking, searching.*

**Eventually I cannot find the hotel.**
→ *I cannot locate the analytic relationship that was supposed to orient the exploration.*

That is not simply "patient disorganization." It is potentially a dream representation of **therapeutic disorientation**.

### And that creates a striking paradox

Haller apparently experienced your associative process as:

**You wander too much; come back.**

Your experience of Haller seems to have been:

**I need someone who will let me wander deeply enough while remaining capable of helping me find my way back.**

Those are very different conceptions of containment.

A containing analyst does not necessarily prevent the patient from entering the woods. The analyst may permit substantial associative wandering while maintaining enough of the analytic frame and enough receptive attention that the patient can eventually discover the structure linking apparently disparate material.

That makes the London dream's hotel especially suggestive. The hotel could represent **the secure base from which psychic wandering becomes possible**. The catastrophe is not merely wandering. It is wandering **without confidence that the base remains findable**.

And that connects directly with the interpretation you already developed concerning the missing idealizable/container object: you explicitly ask whether being unable to reach "quaint old London" and unable to get back to the hotel expresses anguish about finding an object capable of containing your experience. STEPPENWOLF(20260810-131709)

### The deepest formulation

I would therefore formulate the sequence this way:

**Haller:** "When you associate, you get lost in the woods."

**Your conscious response:** "Precisely. Getting lost is necessary. That is how unconscious material is discovered."

**Your unconscious response, represented by the London dream:**
**"But what if I really get lost? What if I surrender conscious control and there is nobody capable of helping me get back?"**

And then another layer answers:

**"That is precisely what frightens me about this therapist. I do not trust her to know the way back."**

That is why I would not reduce the London dream either to *fear of regression* or to *criticism of Haller*. It appears to hold both sides of the conflict simultaneously: **a powerful wish to surrender yourself to associative exploration and a powerful anxiety that surrender without a sufficiently trusted analytic object will become not exploration but abandonment and disorientation.**

In that sense, Haller's "lost in the woods" remark may be one of the most important verbal bridges into the London dream. The dream turns her dismissive metaphor into an entire **transference landscape**.

Sources

PDF **beyond the pleasure prin...**
PDF

I need someone who will let me wander deeply enough while remaining capable of helping me find my way back. Reminds me of Freud's references to the child's "Fort-da" game in Beyond the Pleasure Principle.

Yes. The **Fort–Da game gives a remarkably good model for what you were describing about analytic wandering**—especially if we focus not simply on disappearance, but on **disappearance-with-the-possibility-of-return**.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud describes the child repeatedly throwing the reel away so that it disappears—*fort*, "gone"—and then pulling it back by its string—*da*, "there." Freud treats the game as an active transformation of an experience the child had previously undergone passively: the mother's departure. The child makes disappearance something he can stage, repeat, and in some measure master. The relevant discussion is on the pages reproduced in your upload where Freud moves from the child's throwing-away game to the complete disappearance-and-return sequence. beyond the pleasure principle

That immediately suggests a richer reading of your formulation:

> **"I need someone who will let me wander deeply enough while remaining capable of helping me find my way back."**

The crucial phrase is **"find my way back."**

In analytic free association, one temporarily relinquishes the ordinary executive demand that thought remain linear, relevant, organized and consciously directed. In a sense, one permits oneself to go **fort**: away from the familiar organizing structures of consciousness. Associations wander into childhood, fantasy, bodily sensation, literature, dreams, apparently irrelevant memories, words and images.

But that surrender becomes psychologically possible only if there is some confidence in **da**—return.

And this is where Haller's "lost in the woods" formulation becomes especially interesting.

She apparently treated getting lost as the problem. You experienced getting lost as potentially **the method**. In your manuscript you explicitly turn her metaphor around: the "wild mushrooms" necessary for analytic understanding are found by getting lost in the associative woods. STEPPENWOLF(20260810-131709)

The Fort–Da analogy suggests a third formulation:

**The issue isn't whether the patient gets lost. The issue is whether getting lost occurs within a relationship and frame in which return remains possible.**

That is much closer to your London dream.

You wander away from the hotel. Wandering itself isn't initially catastrophic. The catastrophe begins when you discover that you have lost the **means of return**: you cannot remember the hotel's name or address and therefore cannot tell the cabbie where to take you. You think you are "utterly lost" with no hope of getting back.

STEPPENWOLF(20260810-131709)

That resembles a Fort game **without the string**.

## The string may be the most useful part of the analogy

Freud's child can throw the reel away precisely because **it remains attached to a string**.

That detail maps beautifully onto analytic technique.

The analyst does not have to prevent the reel from disappearing. Indeed, preventing disappearance would destroy the game. The analyst's task can instead be conceived as maintaining the thread that permits return.

In psychotherapy that "string" might consist of:

- the stable analytic frame;
- the analyst's memory of earlier material;
- evenly suspended attention;
- tolerance of associative discontinuity;
- the analyst's capacity to recognize connections the patient cannot yet recognize;
- and the patient's developing confidence that apparently disconnected material can eventually be brought into relation.

The patient can therefore say, metaphorically:

**"I'm going to disappear into my associations, but somebody is holding the other end of the string."**

That is very different from Haller's apparent response:

**"You're getting lost. Stop wandering."**

If that was your experience of her, then her intervention may have interfered with precisely the psychological condition that would have made deeper regression tolerable.

## And your cab-driver image makes the same point

Several months before the London dream, you told Haller that you felt like a passenger in a taxi: **you depended on her to get you where you needed to go, but she depended upon you for directions**, which left you feeling desperate. STEPPENWOLF(20260810-131709)

That is structurally very close to Fort–Da.

The difficulty isn't simply:

**"I don't know where I'm going."**

Of course you don't. That is partly why you're in analysis.

The frightening situation is:

**"I don't know where I'm going, and the person accompanying me seems to require me to know the route."**

Then regression becomes dangerous rather than productive.

The London dream turns that into a nightmare: you finally find someone who can transport you—the cabbie—but you cannot supply the information he requires. The potential helper possesses locomotion but not orientation.

### There is also an autonomy paradox here

Fort–Da is particularly appropriate because Freud emphasizes the child's movement from **passivity to activity**.

Something happens to the child: mother leaves.

The child then creates a symbolic situation in which **he makes the object leave and makes it return**.

That fits a major tension in your therapy with Haller. You repeatedly struggled over autonomy—your own writing, interpretation, free association, contacting analysts, reducing session frequency, deciding what material to pursue. Haller seems to have experienced some of this in terms of "power and control." Your manuscript explicitly discusses that conflict. But Fort–Da suggests that activity and control needn't simply be pathological domination. They may also be ways of making dependency psychologically tolerable.

The child can tolerate:

**Mother leaves me**

by transforming it into:

**I make the object disappear, and I can bring it back.**

Analogously, self-analysis and associative wandering might sometimes transform:

**"I am dependent upon an analyst who may fail me"**

into:

**"I can venture away, think independently, and still return to the analytic relationship."**

That does not mean every exercise of autonomy is healthy or that self-analysis cannot become defensive. It means that **the autonomy itself is analyzable rather than something simply to suppress**.

### It also changes the meaning of "regression"

This may be the deepest connection.

You were explicitly asking Haller for a technique that permitted regression and emergence of unconscious processes. You reminded her that she had criticized your association as "getting lost in the woods." STEPPENWOLF(20260810-131709)

But psychologically productive regression requires an expectation of return.

One could represent the sequence as:

**DA → FORT → DA**

ordinary organized consciousness
→ associative regression / disappearance into psychic depth
→ reintegration and return.

A successful analytic hour therefore need not keep you continuously at **da**—continuously coherent, reflective, organized and relationally present.

Quite the opposite. It may require repeated oscillations:

**here → away → here → away → here.**

And each successful return makes the next departure safer.

That is almost exactly what the child is rehearsing in Freud's game.

### The London dream may represent a breakdown of Fort–Da

Seen this way, your London dream becomes especially poignant.

The dream doesn't merely say:

**"I am afraid of getting lost."**

It may say:

**"I am afraid that this particular analytic relationship cannot sustain the Fort–Da rhythm."**

You can go **fort**.

You can wander.

You can dig into foundations—the dream is filled with excavation and construction, which you yourself associated with psychoanalysis. STEPPENWOLF(20260810-131709)

But where is **da**?

Where is the recognizable hotel?

Where is the analyst who can receive the material and help organize the return?

That is precisely what is missing.

And this produces a striking reinterpretation of Haller's phrase. When she said you were "getting lost in the woods," she may have thought she was protecting analytic coherence by preventing excessive wandering. But from the standpoint we're developing, the more analytic intervention might have been:

**"Go farther. I'll remember where we came from."**

Not literally, of course, and not without limits. But psychologically that may capture what you were asking of the analytic object.

The analyst becomes neither a tour guide who dictates every turn nor a passive observer who lets the patient disappear indefinitely. The analyst becomes, in Fort–Da terms, **the reliable continuity that makes disappearance survivable**.

And I think that adds something important to our earlier formulation. You didn't simply want permission to "get lost." You wanted an experience in which **being lost would cease to mean being abandoned**.

Sources

ChatGPT can make mistakes. Check important info.